

CHAPTER 6

Political Science and the Undergraduate

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I

Reflection on the training of undergraduates is not only an obligation imposed on us by our functions as teachers, it is a salutary opportunity for us as scientists and scholars to reassess ourselves and our discipline at a time when it is directionless and in disarray as well as having lost its appeal to students. The younger student—not yet committed to any profession, still open to various temptations and blandishments, in need of inspiration, learning and guidance—provides an excellent focal point, for in thinking of him we are constrained to think about what we should contribute to the formation of a whole man and what we actually are contributing to that formation. We must try to determine where political science fits in the scheme of the sciences and what role its study plays in the economy of the soul.

This kind of return to our origins has been sadly neglected. For a long while a combination of self-satisfaction and the hopes generated by the new scientific project in politics kept political scientists from serious reflection on their pedagogical responsibilities, except to the extent they sought for recruits to the new science. Being unattractive to undergraduates became almost a hallmark of the seriousness of a political scientist—showing that he had divorced himself from vulgar common sense and youthful enthusiasm, that he had become like the physical scientist in his laboratory. Then, when real politics made insistent demands, some political scientists returned to the young, not as teachers but as followers and demagogues, and extorted promises from the other political scientists in their newly donned white smocks that what was going to emerge from the laboratories would be of benefit to the activists. All this was only response to immediate pressure, not serious re-thinking. Political science curricula are now un-

structured heaps, reflecting unarticulated tastes and compromises reached for the sake of domestic tranquility. They reflect no agreement about what political science is or what kind of training makes a political scientist.

To put it bluntly, students and citizens in general have an instinctive awareness of what politics is, but political science does not have any view of what it is, or at least not one that in any way corresponds to or refines that untutored awareness. This makes political science repulsive or at least uninspiring to students. It is no accident that the student political movements of the sixties had no roots in political science, were uninformed by real political knowledge, were in part directed against social science, and found among political scientists only a few late supporters who were afraid to miss the wave of the future. They were neither inspired by political scientists, nor restrained by them, nor educated by them. Their intellectual sources were in sociology, philosophy, and above all literature. Political scientists had not anticipated the movement and had nothing to say about it.

Now the awareness of which I speak is that politics has to do with justice and the realization of the good life. Somehow the authoritative political decisions about war and peace, who shall govern, education, etc., appear to determine our way of life. Politics is the arena where we most effectively settle our destinies, where we fulfill ourselves and the best of us win glory. As such it makes the highest demands on our bodies and our souls; it can at least make a claim to be the natural end of man. The quest for community in political practice and values in political theory which animated radical students was an expression, however distorted, of this political awareness and need. Aristotle was not enunciating a personal doctrine but merely giving voice to the citizen's perspective when he said that the *polis* is the association whose end is the highest and most comprehensive good, the one that includes all other goods and on which they depend. The citizen has perhaps been frustrated by modern civil society as a whole, but he has most certainly been frustrated by political science from which he had a right to expect instruction and clarification about the ends of politics and the means available to him for fulfilling them. He has been largely left with his inchoate sentiments, either quiescent or raging.

To survey the difficulty one need only look at contemporary

political science and compare it with the political science sketched by Aristotle. He called it, corresponding to its subject matter, the architectonic or master science, the one that ordered all the others, the queen of the sciences, the one that treated of the highest good, the enlightener of citizen and statesman. Our political science would not impress anyone with an imperial claim; it is one of the least reputable and advanced of the modern social sciences. It is the oldest of the social sciences, with a history going back to Socrates, whereas most of the others are of very recent origin, and all were founded in conformity with the project of the new natural sciences of which mathematics was the queen and back to which all the others were to be led. While the older queen was deposed, she has proved to be an intractable subject, resisting reduction to more primary sciences, her matter intransigently demanding common sense in order to come to light, qualitative distinctions in order to maintain its proportions, judgment about good and bad in order to be intelligible. Economics could, by abstraction from political reality, find quantifiable units, but the economy remains only a part of the political order, subject to and requiring the guidance of politics, the cause of great distortions if emancipated. In the first place, then, political science needs both a basis for a common good and an irreducibly political dimension of human nature, but it cannot find them any more and is at least partially committed not to finding them.

Further, political science is a halfway science in another way. It is both practical and theoretical. Political science is intended to assist the statesman and the citizen. It is also in quest of an understanding of human nature. These two functions are at a certain tension with one another. Theoretical impartiality is easily compromised by political commitment, and practical usefulness is frequently despised by the new scientists. And practice is in its turn corrupted by abstractness and doctrinarianism. Actually, however, the two sides contribute to one another—the perspective of political actions providing the subject matter and the concern, the perspective of theory providing the distance and reflectiveness which can both correct policy and give us the opportunity to escape the limits of our own time and place. But the new political science has eschewed this productive tension without fulfilling the demands of one side of it or the other. The “serious” political scientists tend to despise the practical perspective as journalistic or worse. But their science does not attain to the level of an explana-

tion of political man. A famous political scientist once asserted to me that it was wrong for the APSA to invite famous political figures to address its conventions. "They are our data," he said. "When physicists have Geiger counters giving speeches at their conventions, then I will think it right to let President Truman speak to us." I doubt whether a political science which looks at statesmen and their concerns as a biologist looks at genes through a microscope is even possible. It would certainly be irrelevant to an undergraduate student who is going to be a voter or who hopes to be a politician. One of the most salient characteristics of many political scientists is that they are not interested in politics. Aristotle considered political science to be but a refinement of such an interest; new political scientists pride themselves on a radical break with it.

There is a final reason for political science's problems with undergraduate education, and this one is only in part due to the behavioral movement. Political science is no longer able to distinguish between the important and the unimportant, the central and the peripheral. Aside from the methodological considerations which helped to blur these distinctions, the simple growth of the sub-disciplines in the last twenty years has covered over the core to such an extent that one wonders whether it is there any more. The expansion of the universities, their willingness to respond to ephemeral demands, and the encouragement of foundations brought a horde of specialists—particularly in area studies—into political science departments the studies of whose fields should have been relegated to research institutes but who as professors had to teach courses and who constituted a voting majority in matters of department policy. Now, for example, it is difficult to find courses taught in Western European politics and difficult to find teachers for them, while areas of secondary significance for the understanding of politics are overrepresented. I would venture to suggest that American politics, international relations, and political theory are what every student most needs to know about. I do not think the required instruction reflects this, to the extent that there is a required course of instruction.

What political science education ought to be can be inferred from what I am saying it is not. It should concern itself with the great political issues—freedom, equality, virtue, religion, family and patriotism. It should provide an experience of political action and principle as well as providing a model of a reasonable approach to these issues. It

should appeal to the student's heart while calling forth his reason. It should at least make a case for the integrity of the political phenomena. It should concentrate on method only to the extent that method contributes to the elaboration of the questions of primary concern. It should show the various possible regimes and the arguments for and against them—particularly in the intention of avoiding the cloying cycle of conformism encouraged by contentless, unprogrammatic rebellion.

II

It is obvious that the incoherence of undergraduate education is a result of behavioralism, its attack on traditional political science, and the various responses to behavioralism. And the resolution of the problem would require a fundamental transformation of the profession's current self-understanding, for the undergraduate training will inevitably reflect the most respectable views held at the highest levels of the discipline; everyone looks to the top, and in the major universities the teachers are the same as the scholars. There is not likely to be both a political education and a political science education when the demands of the two are so disparate as they now are. Thus, although what I suggest is simple, in the current situation it is utopian. However, a few further remarks are appropriate. They may be of use to individuals or small groups of teachers who are interested in politics and suggest a strategy for their educational endeavors.

In the first place, there is no doubt as to what is attracting the students at all levels: political theory. In the major universities where theory was not abandoned, the theory offerings are the most popular, and graduate applicants list their intended specialization as theory more than any other. In the others there is a persistent clamor for the hiring of theorists. There are a lot of bad reasons for this renaissance of theory. On the surface, it seems to be the easiest thing to study and to provide the maximum opportunity for self-indulgence, gab, and indignation. In some quarters theory has meant little more than a cynical and self-serving outlet for anti-establishment sentiments and has become a grab-bag for every trendy movement of letting go and irrationalism. The taste for political philosophy can have its source in this generation's peculiar combination of intellectual laziness and desire for authority. But this taste gives evidence of a healthy instinct which,

it trained, can bear serious fruit. That instinct is connected with the desire for living a good life, the further desire for enlightenment about what a good life might be, a longing for alternatives to what is available, the sense that the excitement and morality of life are to be found in politics. Underlying the behavioral movement in the U.S. was the conviction that all questions of principle had been solved by the advent of the New Deal and its ultimate universal acceptance and that what remained were questions of appropriate means. The current generation has taken cognizance of the shattering of that conviction, the end of the end of ideology. The study of the great texts in political philosophy attracts and sublimates this primary instinct, and by way of them the student can be led toward the careful study of concrete political reality. It is from the discussion of the good life and the just regime—and the demonstration that the books of tradition are the basis of this discussion—that one must begin with this rootless and largely unpolitical generation.

At this point I should pause to make two comments on the character of undergraduate students today, apart from the orientation toward jobs of which they are too frequently accused. (1) They do not have that everyday interest in politics as it is practiced which an older generation had. Who's in? Who's out? is not the substance of their daily consciousness and conversation. They do not follow events and personalities, either domestic or foreign. They are very private, and political events impinge on them only in fits and starts, usually in an ideological way and without detailed knowledge. Thus they do not have the stuff out of which political reflection is made. (2) This is not a reading generation. They do not enjoy reading. They read because they have to for classes or for information. There are almost no fundamental books which form their souls, which provide a common core of learning or a viewpoint. There is nothing like what the Bible, or Shakespeare, or Locke or Marx or Freud meant to earlier generations.

Both of these factors provide an obstacle to political science training. Students must first become involved in books. The books must be presented to them by teachers who care about them, know them, believe that they contain alternatives which might be chosen by their students, and can communicate some enthusiasm for them. A good example of a book well suited for this task is Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. At first sight it appears a bore to the students—long, out-

dated, and descriptive of what they think they already know. But when they become aware, for example, that Tocqueville in describing the democratic mind describes their mind and that that mind is gravely limited in its capacity for the sciences and the arts, they begin to take notice. Tocqueville argues that contained in the very principle of democracy is a tendency to intellectual mediocrity and conformism. This is a troubling assertion, one which the student is likely to discount for his own protection and because he has almost no experience of intellectual greatness. Coordinate with the assertion about the intellectual mediocrity of democratic man is the assertion that aristocrats are likely to be superior in this respect. Now aristocracy is something about which the students know nothing except for certain tales and which they simply identify with oligarchy. They are forced to look to another regime, one which denies the fundamental principle of justice—equality—which all accept and to which they are devoted. They find there are arguments on both sides of the issue, and they take democracy more seriously in calling it into question. They start looking to the practice of democracy, to historical examples of other kinds of regime and above all to the best arguments for each—none of which is simply contained in Tocqueville but to which he points. They are driven out of the narrow confines of the impoverished contemporary alternatives, but they also look at the present more closely. Is there a tyranny of the majority? What can a “power elite” be in a democracy? And Tocqueville also warns that egalitarianism can lead as well to despotism as to freedom. The study of modern tyrannies takes on a new meaning in this light. Tocqueville both teaches about the broadest themes of politics—and does so with a precision based upon experience and observation—and is also himself a model of a political scientist.

In the context of such studies, which would broaden out to the entire history of political philosophy, a student would surely want to know about voting studies; but they would be subordinate to considerations of the issues in elections, and they would surely be less important than the study of the *Federalist*. Statesmanship will be a more fundamental study than statistics. The students must get involved with the great political figures, try to determine what constitutes their gifts, whether they can really influence affairs, what the relation of their prudence is to morality and justice.

Once enthused and politicized they must study history and do

detailed analyses of other regimes that have accomplished great things, some past, others contemporary—the peculiar genius of British parliamentary government and its imperial achievements, that of the Roman republic, etc. Particularly useful is Soviet politics because there Americans, who can hardly really imagine another way of life as essentially different, can immerse themselves in the horrors of a modern tyranny. What is needed is not scientifically neutral studies of development or of managerial elites, but description and analysis of how this regime affects the lives of its subjects, what its goals were, how its rulers found a way to govern so securely. I do not mean that this study is unscientific, partisan, or undertaken with a propagandistic intention. It should be a dispassionate observation, but one that stays close to the questions that any thoughtful man would ask in deciding whether he wants to live in a regime. The student should be open enough to recognize that current American standards are not the only grounds of judgment, but no one's sensibilities should be so dulled by false science as not to recognize murderous despotism. A decent political science must know what everyone knows, that Watergate is bad, and its horizon must also be broad enough to make it impossible to mention it in the same breath with—not to speak of assimilating it to—the Gulag Archipelago. It is here that the fact-value debate becomes frivolous. Regimes such as that of Stalin or Caligula cannot be seen for what they are if one has been forbidden to think of them as bad. It is too simple-minded to say that we must study facts, then teach values. The facts contain the values; the separation destroys both. The study of these foreign regimes should not lead to self-congratulation and is not intended to contribute to any political movement. Its purpose is to understand the nature of political things. When the name of Hitler can be invoked to qualify Richard Daley, political science has failed in its most elemental responsibility. It is our duty to teach about such things. A generation of graduates has been produced from our universities who do not have the slightest idea what Fascism was. Neither the important facts nor the principles of judgment have been learned.

Along with political theory, the sub-discipline which has attracted and stimulated healthy political interest is international relations. Because war and peace are of such immediate and intense concern, even to political scientists, politics among nations has defied reduction. Most of its practitioners talk about real situations and not abstract models. The enormous stakes involved in political life are most clearly felt

here, particularly so today when the confrontations involve differences of fundamental principle as well as oppositions of will. Therefore a truly political judgment is maintained so long as the issues are matters of life and death. Policy orientation helps keep the focus which we are too likely to lose. It risks degenerating into journalism or preoccupation with daily affairs; it can also easily involve the temptations of being too immediately useful to power, actual or anticipated. But one can learn a lot even from those who are so involved. And if the temptations are properly controlled, the international stage is one on which the broadest spectrum of political motives can be played. All the aspects of the statesman's art are revealed there. The relation between the predictable and the unpredictable, nature and chance, become serious questions and can be concretely posed. The relation between justice and survival, principle and expediency, come best to light. The necessity and the difficulty of judging between conflicting claims become manifest. Most of all, the harsh side of life and the real problem of combining humaneness with success can be shown to young people without experience of necessity and imbued with great hopes. Living through the problems of foreign affairs is a good education in the nobility and baseness of political life and helps the student to liberate himself from the doctrinairisms of principle and method. At best it can lead him to contemplate the alternatives contained in the somber gentleness of Thucydides, the hopeful brutality of Machiavelli, and the strict moralism of Kant.

I am not arguing that a similar movement from the practice of politics to the primary theoretical issues could not be made on the basis of American politics. But given the current state of the discipline it is much harder to do so. Aron and Kissinger are closer to politics and to philosophy than are Dahl and Easton.

III

A proper training in political science must not only address itself to the student conceived universally but also to the contemporary American student, by which I mean it must correct the characteristic intellectual defects of our regime. Every regime tends to develop certain potentials at the expense of others, and a good education attempts to counterpoise this tendency for the sake of the intellectual freedom

of the individual and in the hope of mitigating the excesses of the regime. Here again Tocqueville is a good guide. The central weaknesses of egalitarian Americans to which he points and which political science training could help to rectify are the following: (1) a privacy which focuses on petty concerns such that the individual finally cannot lift himself to great issues; (2) a lack of grand ambition; (3) a lack of respect for tradition which ultimately impoverishes their understandings due to a lack of awareness of alternatives; (4) an addiction to abstract ideas; and (5) a readiness to accept deterministic explanations of things, resulting from a sense of the individual's weakness and tending to re-enforce that sense of weakness. All of these inclinations have become more pronounced since Tocqueville's time, and social science is both an expression of them and a further cause of them. With respect to weaknesses (1) and (2) above, social science has concentrated on unpolitical and ignoble motives for everything and particularly political action. With respect to (3), social science method both implicitly and explicitly denies the truth value of older books, and its peculiar brand of empiricism has confined it to recent, and particularly American, experience. With respect to (4) and (5), social science wishes to establish general laws like those of the natural sciences, ignoring the particularity of which politics is largely constituted, and those laws would leave no room for the rational choice of citizen or statesman.

The political science for which I argue and which is really at hand would act as an antidote to these moral and intellectual vices. (1) It begins by taking the political on its own terms and giving it and the motives connected with it a substantial and irreducible existence. (2) It provides a ground and a goal for the peculiarly political desire to be first, to be honored and win glory. It also provides examples and objects of admiration. (3) It makes it possible to see the wisdom in old books and the questions they raised. Our horizons are broadened by the presence of real alternatives to them. Instead of our scrutinizing everything else, we are scrutinized by the great thinkers of the past. (4) Although looking for general rules, it contains no doctrinaire assurance that they are to be found, and is open to the possibility of choice and accident. Moreover it pays particular attention to the concrete and the heterogeneous. (5) It stays on the level of the phenomena and does not explain away the manifest examples of political choice, undetermined by circumstance, affecting the most fundamental political

things. It is, thus, an education in freedom and human dignity without intending to be so.

In my experience the student caught up by the newly discovered possibility of rational reflection on justice and happiness also rediscovers the lost idea of the university—the university, today so much maligned and so uninspiring. He begins to read history for examples. He finds that the greatest literature has a political intention and gives the perfect representation of the essential political-moral problems and the heroes who grapple with them. He begins to see the importance of rhetoric for the persuasion of men. He finds he must look at science, both to evaluate its proper role in society and to find what it teaches about nature in general and hence about human nature. He finds the lost key to the unity of the sciences and thereby to a liberal education. Nothing fancy or particularly new is needed—just teachers, students, books, and a calm setting in which rational discourse is respected. By contemplating politics and its limits we face again the questions without which no life is human: freedom, virtue, god, love, and death.